7: Amery G-5 (1943-44) 1948 EG1 Albania EG1

of the mountaineers. This ancient code of conduct has undoubtedly exercised a restraining influence on the clansmen and helped to soften the grim realities of anarchy. None the less it was our experience that, like other codes of chivalry and laws of war, it was honoured as much in the breach as in the observance. This was perhaps a recent development, born of the crisis of the times or of the influence of Western ideas unaccompanied by Western conditions. Be this as it may, what most impressed us in the way of life of the Albanians was not the stray survivals of their ancient customs but the extent to which they lived without a law at all.

If anarchy was the way, poverty was the standard of their lives. They subsisted mainly from their flocks and upon maize, grown wherever the valleys offered soil for their wooden ploughs to scratch, or traded in the towns against hides and dairy produce. Their fare was simple; their clothing homespun; the forests gave them fuel, and, with the rocks of the mountain, their building materials. They lived, Turkish fashion, on the ground, and, beyond a few rugs, mattresses, and cooking utensils, required no other furniture or amenities. Tobacco, salt, sugar, and coffee, were their luxuries; weapons their chief expenditure and pride.

But besides this pastoral economy there was another source of wealth from which the mountaineers, and especially the chief men among them, drew their strength. Bad communications made coercion difficult, but the poverty of the clans made the power of money great. Elsewhere this might have been of no great moment, but in the Balkans the clashing interests of the Powers afforded frequent opportunities for holding the Central Government to ransom, or indulging in mercenary enterprise on behalf of the foreigner. Such enterprise had ever been a time-honoured means of livelihood among the Albanians; and, if the Eastern Question had caused the ruin of their merchants, it had also created boom conditions for their mercenaries. Such indeed had been the influx of gold and arms into the mountains in the past hundred years that it was perhaps not too much to say that the whole economy and strength of many of the clans had become dependent on subsidies received for "political

10:Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EGl Albania EGl

Obviously the crude and comfortless character of the Albanian house indicated a low standard of living and dire poverty in the ordinary sense of the word. But the Albanian had his compensations. He was secure in what he had, and unless he lived in an over-populated area like Dibër, he had the essentials. In alluvial areas like Myzeqe and in a few villages in the district of Mat there were big estates worked by share-croppers, but with these few exceptions the Albanian owned his house and land and need not think of rent or eviction. Since forests and commons belonged to his village or tribe and their products were free to him and his fellows, he need think only of the trouble involved in fetching his firewood and grazing his sheep. With luck he might have surplus animals to sell in a market town for money that would pay for his taxes, for clothing, for imported goods like coffee and sugar, and, costliest of all, for brides. With subsistence as his only possible aim, he need not work every day and so enjoyed a good deal of leisure. In short, although his comforts and amenities were few, so also were his worries.

438 On the other side of the picture lie the craftsmen and shopkeepers in the towns, some Albanian, others Turkish, others Serbian. These craftsmen live off the exports from the mountains and from the other agricultural regions around them, and supply the mountaineers with their needs, including firearms and ammunition, as well as the objects previously listed.

So far the picture is simple, mountaineers on one side of the fence, townsmen on the other. A mountaineer may become a townsman, but never the reverse. At several points, however, the security of the mountains is penetrated: by the itinerant masons who build *kullas*,[1] by the *hanjis*[2] and *kiragis*[3] who handle traffic and care for travelers, and by the shopkeepers, who are themselves usually Ghegs, and who are found in the larger tribal villages, usually but one to a settlement. I can recall but one in Mirdita, none in Shoshi, while in the country villages of Dibra, Luma, and Puka, along the main roads, there were several. These men sold tea and sugar, needles and thread, cigarette papers, salt and pepper, a little candy, candles, kerosene, kerchiefs, and matches. They saved a trip to town for minor purchases.

511 With this balance of production and trade,[4] the Ghegs barely succeed in making a living. If their average income could be accurately assessed, it would be one of the lowest in Europe. The ordinary farmer has just enough clothing to cover his family. In some cases I have seen brothers with one suit between them; one had to stay indoors while the other went out. This was in Merturi. The ordinary household has just enough food to get through the year, saving the next year's seed and selling a little in the town. Many houses are the scenes of tightened belts and near starvation every spring. Since there is no knowledge of contraception, many children are born. As ideas of sanitation are also lacking, many people die, and the population is always a little greater than the threshold of tolerance. Feuds, sudden death, and emigration are necessary safety valves. Another very recent one is enlistment in the gendarmerie.

[842]
[165]

1 [See Cat. 116, pp. 14b - 15a -- Analyst]
2 [See cat. 116, pp. 20b - 21a -- Analyst]
3 [See cat. 116, pp. 20a - 20b - Analyst]
4 [see cat. 116 pp 21a - b -- Analyst]

125 not remember how many children the oldest wife had had.

128 595 These statistics do not constitute a record of pregnancies. Children who died in infancy are probably not included. Female infanticide has not been reported in Ghegnia. Presumably all or most of the children grew to such an age that either they were still living in 1929–30, or were old enough at the time of death to have made an impression on their full or half brothers who were our subjects. Our figures tell how many wives each father had, but not how many at a time. It would be hard to get that information from a casual questioning done in public at the time of measuring. In 1929 polygyny was legally forbidden in Albania for Catholics and Moslems alike, and the Catholics had in addition the position of the church to keep them from revealing the polygyny of their parents in the presence of several dozen other people. One other obvious defect of our data is that we have no record of marriages in which no son was born, and no second wife taken. This circumstance, although rare, must have occurred. The reader may think, in view of the unusual sex ratio, 163 male to 100 female offspring, that Moslems failed to reveal the true number of girls born, but I do not believe that this was the case. The Catholics had the same sex ratio as the Moslems. Furthermore, if many more children had been born than were recorded, the reproductive systems of Gheg mothers would have been taxed beyond their capacities.

As table 1 reveals,* 1060 Ghegs married 1375 women. Three-fourths of the men had but one wife each, the rest anywhere from 2 to 6. A third of all Moslems married more than once, compared to a sixth of Catholics. The greater plurality on the part of the Moslems reflects the greater fertility of the soil in the eastern tribes, which are almost wholly Moslem, and where a man can afford more wives and feed more children. The wholly Catholic tribes, Mirdita and Dukagin, are the poorest in Ghegnia. Where the Catholics and Moslems live together in about equal numbers, the Catholics marry as many wives as the Moslems. In fact, in Puka the Catholics had more. Religion therefore has little to do with the total number of wives a man marries, although it

● [511]

*[see p. 236 -- Analysis]